

Tofa language

Tofa, also known as **Tofalar** or **Karagas**, is a moribund Turkic language spoken in Russia's Irkutsk Oblast by the Tofalars. Recent estimates for speakers run from 93 people^[1] to less than 40.^[3]

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Classification

Tofa is most closely related to the Tuvan language^[4] and forms a dialect continuum with it. Tuha, and Tsengel Tuvan may be dialects of either Tuvan or Tofa. Tofa shares a number of features with these languages, including the preservation of *d as /d/ (as in *hodan* "hare" - compare Uzbek *quyon*) and the development of low tones on historically short vowels (as in **et* > *èt* "meat, flesh").

Alexander Vovin (2017) notes that Tofa and other Siberian Turkic languages, especially Sayan Turkic, have Yeniseian loanwords.^[5]

Geographical and demographical distribution

The Tofa, who are also known as the Tofalar or Karagas, are an indigenous people living in southwestern Irkutsk Oblast, in Russia. The region they inhabit is informally known as Tofalaria. They are traditionally a nomadic reindeer-herding people, living on or near the Eastern Sayan mountain range. However, reindeer herding has greatly declined since the 20th century, with only one Tofa family now continuing the practice.^[6] Recognized by the former USSR in 1926 as one of the "Small Numbered Minorities of the North," (Russian: *коренные малочисленные народы Севера, Сибири и Дальнего Востока*) the Tofa have special legal status and receive economic support from Russia. The Tofa population is around 750 people; around 5% of the population spoke Tofa as a first language in 2002, (although that number has likely declined since then, due to the age of the speakers).^{[6][7]} Although the population of Tofalaria appears to be growing, the number of ethnic Tofalar seems to be in decline.

Tofa	
Тоѡфа дыл [tɔʰfa d̪əɫ]	
Native to	Russia
Region	Irkutsk Oblast
Ethnicity	Tofalar
Native speakers	93 (2010 census) ^[1]
Language family	<div>Turkic<ul style="list-style-type: none">Common Turkic<ul style="list-style-type: none">Siberian<ul style="list-style-type: none">South Siberian<ul style="list-style-type: none">Sayan Turkic<ul style="list-style-type: none">Tofa</div>
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	kim
Glottolog	kara1462 (http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/kara1462) ^[2]



Historical Range of Tofalaria

Effects of language contact

Language contact—mainly with Russian speakers—has been extensive since 1926, when the Tofa officially received their "Small Numbered Minorities of the North" status from the USSR (Russian: *коренные малочисленные народы Севера, Сибири и Дальнего Востока*) and underwent significant cultural, social, and economic changes. Most notably, this traditionally nomadic, reindeer-herding people have since become sedentary and reindeer herding has all but vanished among the Tofa.^[8] In addition to visiting tax collectors and tourists, many other Russians have come to the Sayan mountain range to live. Russian migration and intermarriage also has had an

effect, according to a citation by Donahoe: "In 1931, of a total population in Tofalaria of 551, approximately 420 (76%) were Tofa, and the remaining 131 (24%) were non-Tofa, predominantly Russian (Mel'nikova 1994:36 and 231). By 1970, the population in Tofalaria had increased to 1368, of whom 498 (36%) were Tofa, and 809 (59%) were Russian (Sherkhunaev 1975:23)."^[6](p. 159) There were approximately 40 speakers of various fluency levels by 2002, and this number has likely continued to decrease in the intervening time.^{[7][9]}

Writing system

Tofa, although not often written, employs a Cyrillic alphabet:

А а	Б б	В в	Г г	Ғ ғ	Д д	Е е
Ә ә	Ё ё	Ж ж	З з	И и	І і	Й й
К к	Қ қ	Л л	М м	Н н	Ң ң	О о
Ө ө	П п	Р р	С с	Т т	У у	Ү ү
Ф ф	Х х	Һ һ	Ц ц	Ч ч	Ҫ ҫ	Ш ш
Щ щ	Ъ ъ	Ы ы	Ь ь	Э э	Ю ю	Я я

Tofa has letters that are not present in the Russian alphabet: Ғ ғ [ɣ], Ә ә [æ], І і [iː], Қ қ [q], Ң ң [ŋ], Ө ө [œ], Ү ү [y], Һ һ [h], and Ҫ ҫ [d͡ʒ]. Additionally, the letter Ъ ъ is sometimes used after a vowel to mark pharyngealization [ˤ], as in Эт [ʔɛˤt̚] "meat".

Phonology

Vowel harmony

Many dialects of Tofa exhibit vowel harmony, although this harmony seems to be linked to fluency: as one decreases, so does the other.^[10] Tofa vowel harmony is progressive and based on two features: backness and rounding, and this occurs both root-internal and in affixes.^[10] Enclitics do not appear to trigger backness harmony, and rounding harmony in Tofa has been undergoing changes, and may apply inconsistently. In some cases this may be due to opaque rules resulting in an apparent "disharmony", especially among speakers of the younger generation.^[3] The complications surrounding Tofa vowel harmony may also be due

to fluctuations from language endangerment.^[11] In general, Russian loanwords do not appear to conform to vowel harmony.^[10] Given the increasing quantity of these loanwords, leveling may also be a factor in the inconsistent application of vowel harmony.

Morphology and syntax

Tofa is an agglutinative language with a few auxiliary verbs.^[3] The bare stem of a verb is only used in the singular imperative; other categories are marked by suffixation, including the singular imperative negative.^[3] The Tofa suffix /--sig/ is an especially unusual derivational suffix in that it attaches to any noun to add the meaning 'smelling of + [NOUN]' or 'smelling like + [NOUN]'.^[12] Grammatical number in Tofa includes singular, plural, dual inclusive ('you and me'), and plural inclusive, tense includes the present and past, and aspect includes the perfective and imperfective.^[3] Historically suffixes conformed to Tofa vowel harmony rules, but that appears to be changing.^[3] Some example sentences are included below to illustrate suffixation.^[3]

Rounding Harmony in Suffixes	Gloss	Rounding Harmony in Roots	Gloss
gøk—tyɣ	'grass'--[ADJ]	[tyŋgyr]	'drum'
tyŋgyr—lyɣ	'drum'--[ADJ]	[kuduruk]	'wolf'
kuduruk—tuɣ	'wolf'--[ADJ] (literally 'tail'--[ADJ])	[oruk]	'road'

Plural Perfective

orus[t]e -y ber-gen

Russian[ize]-[CV] [ASP]-[PST]

'They have become Russian[ized]'

Singular Imperative

*nersa-ɣa **bar***

Nerxa-[DAT] go

'go to Nerxa'

Singular Imperative Negative

al-gan men 'di-ve

take-[PST] 1 say-[NEG]

'don't say "I took"'

Pronouns

Tofa has six personal pronouns:

Personal pronouns

Singular		Plural	
Tofa (transliteration)	English	Tofa (transliteration)	English
мен (men)	I	биъс (bis)	we
сен (sen)	you (<i>singular</i>)	сілер (siler)	you (<i>plural, formal</i>)
оң (on)	he/she/it	оларың (olarıñ)	they

Tofa also has the pronouns бо "this", тээ "that", кум "who", and чү "what".

References

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External links

- 'Natural' and Obsolescent Change in Tofa (<http://www.swarthmore.edu/SocSci/dharris2/Anderson&Harrison%202004.pdf>)
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